

THE APE AND THE IDIOT.

By W. C. Morrow.

was principally the work of Romulus; and yet, grim as he was, there was in it more play than work. The train of his wagons, strung along a dusty road in the Santa Clara valley, crept slowly under the beating heat of a July sun. The dust rolled in clouds over the gaudy wagons of the nagerie. The outer doors of the cages had been opened to give access of air to the panting animals, but with the air came the dust, and the dust annoyed Romulus greatly. He had longed for freedom so intensely. Ever since he could remember he had been in a cage like this; it had been so through all his childhood and youth. There was no place in his memory when he had been free. Not the faintest recollection existed of the time when he might have been in the lofty branches of equatorial forests. To him was a desolation and a despair, and the poignancy of it was sharpened by the clouds of dust which rolled through the grated door.

He sought the wits of Romulus thereupon sought means of escape. He was able, deft, sharp-sighted, he found a weak place in his cage, worked it open, and leaped forth upon the highway, a free, anthropoid ape. None of the sleepy, weary drivers noticed his escape, and a proper sense of caution caused him to seek security under a wayside shrub, until the procession safely passed. Then the whole world lay before him.

Freedom was large and sweet, but for awhile perplexing. An almost instinctive leap to catch the trapeze-bar that hung in his cage brought his hands in contact only with a cold, hard bar. This confused and somewhat frightened him. The world seemed much broader and brighter since the black bars of his prison no longer striped his vision. And then, to his amazement, in place of the dingy covering of his cage he saw a vast and awful expanse of blue heaven, the treacherous depth and distance of which terrified him.

He was scampering of a ground-squirrel seeking its burrow caught his notice, and he watched the little animal with curiosity. Then he ran to the burrow, and hurt his feet on the sharp wheat-stubble. This made him more cautious. Finding the squirrel, he looked about and discovered two sitting on a little mound not far away. Their solemn fastened upon him inspired him with awe, but his curiosity would not permit him to forego a closer view. He crept toward them; then he stopped, sat down and looked at the most grotesque faces at them. This had no effect. He scratched his head and thought. Then he made a feint as though he would pounce upon them, and they flew. He gazed at them with the greatest amazement, for he had never before had seen anything skim through the air. But the world was so wide and freedom so large that surely every-thing ought to fly; so Romulus sprang into the air and with motions with his arms like to those the owls made with wings; and the first grievous disappointment which his own brought came when he found himself sprawling on the ground in the stubble.

His alert mind sought other exercise. Some distance away a house, and at the front-gate was a man, and Romulus knew that man to be the meanest and most cruel of all living things, and the conscienceless task-master of all breathing creatures which the Lord in heaven had placed upon the earth.

So Romulus avoided the house and struck out across the fields. Presently he came upon a very large thing which he knew. It was a live-oak, and the birds were singing in its foliage. But his persistent curiosity put a curb upon his feet, and he crept closer and closer. The kindly aspect of the tree, the sweetness of the shade which it cast, the coolness of its foliage, the gentle swaying of the boughs in the northern wind—all invited him to approach. This he did until he had arrived at the gnarled old hole, and then he climbed into the branches and was filled with delight. The birds took flight. Romulus sat upon a limb, and then he stretched himself at full length upon it and enjoyed the peace and comfort of the moment. But he was an ape and had to be employed, and so he ran upon the smaller branches and shook them after the manner of his parents before him.

These delights all exploited, Romulus dropped to the ground and began to explore the world again; but the world was so wide and his loneliness oppressed him. Presently he saw a dog, and made quickly for him. The dog, seeing the strange creature approach, sought to frighten it by barking; but Romulus had seen similar animals before and had heard similar sounds; he could not be frightened by them. He went toward the dog by long leaps on all-fours. The dog, startled by the strange-looking creature, ran away yelping, and left Romulus with freedom and the world again.

He went Romulus over the fields, crossing a road now and then and keeping clear of all living things that he found. Finally he came to a high picket-fence, surrounding a great enclosure, in which sat a large house, in a grove of eucalyptus-trees.

Romulus was thirsty, and the playing of a fountain in the distance tempted him sorely. He might have found a way to venture within had he not at that moment discovered a human being, not ten feet away, on the other side of the fence. Romulus sprang back with a cry of terror, and he stopped, and in a crouching attitude, ready to fly for his life and freedom, gazed at the enemy of all creation.

He looked which he received in return was so kindly, so calm, so peculiar, and so unlike any that he had ever seen before, that the instinct to fly yielded to his curiosity to discover. Romulus did not know that the great house in the distance was an idiot asylum, nor that the lad with the strange, kindly expression was one of the inmates. He knew that kindness was there. The look which he saw was so kind and cruel one of his keeper, nor the empty, idle, as one of the spectators, countenancing by their presence and supporting with their money the infamous and exclusively in practice of capturing wild animals and keeping them in their lives in the torture of captivity. So deeply interested

was Romulus in what he saw that he forgot his fear, and cocked his head on one side, and made a queer grimace; and his motions and attitude were so comical that Moses, the idiot, grinned at him through the pickets. But the grin was not the only manifestation of pleasure that Moses gave. A peculiar, vermicular movement, beginning at his feet and ending at his head, was the precursor of a slow, vacant guffaw, that expressed the most intense delight of which he was capable. Moses never before had seen so queer a creature as this little brown man, all covered with hair—he never before had seen even a monkey, that common joy of ordinary childhood, and remoter from resemblance to humankind than was Romulus. Moses was nineteen, but, although his voice was child-like no longer, and his face was covered with unsightly short hair, and he was large and strong, running mostly on legs and arms, he was simple and innocent. His clothes were much too small, and a thick growth of wild hair topped his poll, otherwise innocent of covering.

Thus gazed these two strange beings at each other, held by sympathy and curiosity. Neither had the power of speech, and hence neither could lie to the other. Was it instinct which made Romulus believe that of all the hideous devils which infested the face of the earth, there was one of so gentle spirit that it could love him? And was it by instinct that Romulus, ignorant as he was of the larger ways of the world, discovered that his own mind was the firmer and cleverer of the two? And feeling the hitherto unimaginable sweetness of freedom, did there come to him a knowledge that this fellow-being was a prisoner as he himself had been, and longed for a taste of the open fields? And if Romulus so had reasoned, was it a sense of chivalry or a desire for companionship that led him to the rescue of this one weaker and more unfortunate than he? Who may dare imagine what Romulus thought? It is easier to tell what he did.

He went cautiously to the picket-fence, and put through his hand and touched Moses. The lad, much pleased, took the hand of the ape in his, and at once there was a good understanding between them. Romulus teased the boy to follow him, by going away a few steps and looking back, and then going and pulling his hand through the fence—doing this several times, until his intention worked its way into the idiot's mind. The fence was too high to be scaled; but now that the desire for freedom had invaded his being, Moses crushed the pickets with his feet and emerged from his prison.

These two, then, were at large. The heavens were lifted higher and the horizon was extended. At a convenient water-ditch they slaked their thirst, and in an orchard they found ripe apricots; but what can satisfy the hunger of an ape or an idiot? The world was wide, and sweet, and beautiful, and the exquisite sense of boundless freedom worked like rare old wine in unaccustomed veins. These all brought infinite delight to Romulus and his charge, as over the fields they went.

I will not tell particularly of all they did that wild, mad, happy afternoon, while drunk and reeling with freedom. I might say, in passing, that at one place they tore open the cage of a canary-bird swinging in a cherry-tree out of sight of the house, and that at another they unbuckled the straps binding a baby in a cart, and might have made off with it but for fear of arrest; but these things have no relation to the climax of their adventures, now hastening to accomplishment.

When the sun had sunk lower in the yellow splendor of the west, and the great nickel dome of the observatory on Mount Hamilton had changed from silver to copper, the two revelers, weary and now hungry again, came upon a strange and perplexing place. It was the great oak, with its long, cone-shaped shadow pointed toward the east, and the cool depths of its foliage that first attracted them. About the tree were mounds with wooden head-boards—which wiser ones would have known the meaning of. But how could an ape or an idiot know of a freedom so sweet, and silent, and uncompassed, and unconditional as death? And how could they know that the winners of so rich a prize should be mourned, should be wetted with tears, should be placed in the ground with the strutting pomp which grief can cunningly devise? Knowing nothing at all of things like this, how could they know that this shabby burying-ground upon which they had strayed was so unlike that one which, in clear sight some distance away, was ordered in walks and drive-ways, and ornamented with hedges, and fountains, and statues, and rare plants, and costly monuments—ah, how, without money, may we give adequate expression to grief?—and surely grief without evidence of its existence is the idlest of indulgences!

But there was no pomp in the shadow of the oak; for the broken fence setting apart this place from the influence of Christian civilization, inclosed graves holding only such bones as could not rest easy in soil across which was flung the shadow of the cross. Romulus and Moses knew nothing of these things; knew nothing of laws prohibiting disinterment within two years; knew nothing of politics and the queen of their harem, religion; knew nothing of a strange, far-away people from Asia, who, scornful of the foreign, Christian soil upon which they walked, despising the civilization out of which they wrung money, buried their dead in obedience to a law which they had not the strength to resist, and two years afterward dug up the bones and sent them to the old home, to be interred for everlasting rest in a soil made and nourished by a god of their own.

Should either Romulus or Moses judge between them? They were in better business than that.

Their examination of a strange brick furnace, in which things had been burned, and of a low, brick altar, covered with the grease of used-up tapers, had hardly been finished when an approaching cloud of dust along the broken fence warned them to the exercise of caution. Romulus was the quicker to escape, for a circus-train makes a trail of dust along the road, and, with swift alacrity, he sprang into the boughs of the oak, the heavy Moses clambering laboriously after, emitting guffaws in praise of the superior agility of his guardian. It made Moses laugh again to see the little hairy

man stretch himself on a branch and sigh with the luxurious comfort of repose, and he nearly had fallen in trying to imitate the nimble Romulus. But they were still and silent, when the cloud of dust, parting at a gate, gave forth into the inclosure a cavalcade of shabby carriages and wagons.

There was a grave newly dug, and toward this came the procession—a shallow grave, for one must not lie too deep in the Christian soil of the white barbarian; but it was so small a grave! Even Romulus could have filled it, and as for Moses, it was hardly too large for his feet.

For little Wang Tai was dead, and in this small grave were her fragile bones to rest for forty-eight months under three feet of Christian law. Interest tempered the fright which Romulus and Moses felt, when from the forward carriage came the sound of rasping oboes, hellyless fiddles, brazen tom-toms, and harsh cymbals, playing a dirge for little Wang Tai: playing less for godly protection of her tiny soul than for its exemption from the torture of devils.

With the others there came forth a little woman, all bent with grief and weeping; for little Wang Tai had a mother, and every mother has a mother's heart. She was only a little brown woman from Asia, with queer wide trousers for skirts and rocker-soled shoes that flapped against her heels. Her black hair was firmly knotted and securely pinned, and her eyes were black of color and soft of look, and her face, likely blank in content, was wet with tears and drawn with suffering. And there sat upon her, like a radiance from heaven, the sweetest, the saddest, the deepest, the tenderest of all human afflictions, the one, and the one only, that time can never heal. So they interred little Wang Tai, and Romulus and Moses saw it all; and paper prayers were burned in the oven, and tapers were lighted at the altar; and for the refreshment of the angels that should come to bear poor little Wang Tai's soul to the farther depths of blue heaven some savory viands were spread on the grave. The grave covered, the diggers hid their spades behind the oven, Romulus watching them narrowly. The little bent woman gathered her grief to her heart and bore it away, and a cloud of dust, widening away along the broken fence, disappeared in the distance. The dome on Mount Hamilton had changed from copper to gold; the purple cañons of the Santa Cruz Mountains looked cold against the blazing orange of the western sky; the crickets set up their cheerful notes in the great old oak, and night fell as softly as a dream.

Four hungry eyes saw the viands on the grave, and four greedy nostrils inhaled the aroma. Down dropped Romulus, and with less skill than fell Moses. Poor little Wang Tai's angels must go supperless to heaven this night—and it is a very long road from Christendom to heaven! The two outlaws snatched, and scrambled, and fought; and when all of this little was eaten they set their minds to the performance of further undertaking. Romulus fetched the spades from behind the oven, and industriously began to dig into little Wang Tai's grave; and Moses, crowing and laughing, fell to as assistant, and as the result of their labor the earth flew to either side. Only three feet of loose Christian law covered little Wang Tai!

A small, brown woman, moaning with grief, had tossed all night on her hard bed of matting and her harder pillow of hollowed wood. Even the familiar raucous sounds of early morning in the Chinese Quarter of San José, reminding of that far-distant country which held all of her heart not lying dead under Christian sod, failed to lighten the burden which sat upon her. She saw the morning sun push its way through a sea of amber, and the nickel dome of the great observatory on Mount Hamilton turned to ebony against the radiant east. She heard the Oriental jargon of the early hucksters, who cried their wares in the ill-smelling alleys, and, with tears, she added to the number of pearls which the dew had strewn upon the porch. She was only a small woman from Asia, all bent with grief; and what of happiness could there be for her in the broad, yellow sunshine, which poured forth from the wide windows of heaven, inviting the living habes of all present mankind to find life and health in its luxurious unfolding? She saw the sun climb the ladder of morning with imperious magnificence, and whispering voices from remote Cathay tempered the radiance of the day with memories of the past. Could you, had your hearts been breaking and your eyes blinded with tears, have seen with proper definition the figures of a strange procession, which made its way along the alley under the porch? There were men with three prisoners—three who so recently had tasted the sweets of freedom, and they had been dragged back to servitude! Two of these had been haled from the freedom of life and one from the freedom of death; and all three had been found asleep beside the open grave and open coffin of little Wang Tai. There were wise men abroad, and they said that little Wang Tai, through imperfect skill, had been interred alive, and that Romulus and Moses, by means of their impish pranks, had brought her to life after raising her from the grave; but wherefore the need of all this talk? Is it not enough that the hrigands were whipped and sent back into servitude, and that the windows in the soul of a little brown woman from Asia were opened to receive the warmth of the yellow sunshine that poured in a flood from heaven?

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A British consul in Japan, who has watched sailors carefully, says that Jack is much better mannered since steamers have replaced sailing-vessels. The steamers provide better and less monotonous food, entail less hardship, and have dulled the adventurous, independent, and eternally unsatisfied spirit with which the sailors used to roam about the world.

One of the London street-car companies has in use an automatic "starter." Two powerful spiral springs, fastened to the front axle, are wound up through being applied for the car's stoppage, so that, when it is desired to go on again, they are capable of starting it. The device effects a tremendous saving and mercy to horses.